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ABSTRACT

This study was designed empirically to determine the relationship between student's perception of the humanism, traditionalism, and strict control of the high school environment and their moral reasoning. The subjects, seniors at nine parochial high schools located in four midwestern states, completed an opinion survey and Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview. The results indicate that the perception of the high school environment is related to moral reasoning in much the same way as other studies have found behavior and attitudes of parents to be related to moral reasoning. The present study, however, failed to demonstrate conclusively that there is a relationship between student's perception of the humanism of the school environment and their level of moral maturity. There is a progressive decrease in moral maturity corresponding to an increase in the perceived Traditionalism score. On the Strict Control Scale, those who perceive the high school environment as being low in strict control are significantly lower in moral maturity than those who perceive it as being moderately low, moderately high, and very high in strict control. These results are discussed in relation to the findings of earlier and related studies. (SJL)

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PERCEPTION OF THE HIGH SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS RELATED TO MORAL REASONING

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Over half of Lawrence Kohlberg's published articles deal with the role of the school in promoting moral development; however, the majority of research to date focuses on the role of the parents in promoting moral growth. The research evidence supports the view that there is a relationship between parental behaviors and attitudes and the moral development of their children. High moral development in children is associated with parental discussion with children concerning consequences of behavior (Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967; Shoffeit, 1971), involvement of children in the decision-making process (Holstein, 1972), willingness to help on the part of parents in learning activities (Fodor, 1969), acceptance, autonomy, and strict control (Aron, 1972), and active involvement of parents with children and their willingness to allow the children to make mistakes (Smith, Haan, & Block, 1968). The research findings indicate that parents who are accepting of their children yet exercise control are most likely to have children of high moral development.

The purpose of this study was to empirically determine the relationship between students' perception of the humanism, traditionalism, and strict control of the high school environment and their moral reasoning.

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Method

Subjects

The subjects included the entire senior class at nine Seventh-day Adventist parochial high schools located in four midwestern states. Of the 439 seniors enrolled in the nine schools, 415 were present during the testing periods. There were 113 subjects who attended four day schools and 302 who attended five boarding schools. Seven subjects did not complete either the moral dilemma protocol or the School Opinion Survey and had to be dropped. Based on the father's occupation 38% of the subjects were from upper-middle-class families, 45% were from lower- and lower-middle-class families, and the remaining 17% had fathers who were deceased, unemployed, retired, or gave insufficient information regarding the father's occupation. Subjects were predominately white and were approximately equally divided between males and females.

Instruments

School Opinion Survey. The School Opinion Survey was developed by Shaw and Rector (1967) as "an instrument which would reflect the significant parameters of the educational environment" (Shaw & Rector, 1967, p. 10). Although the School Opinion Survey consists of 10 scales each containing 10 items only the Humanism, Traditionalism, and Strict Control Scales were used as these three scales were most similar to the parental behaviors having a relation to moral development. The Humanism Scale is concerned with individual personal development and self-realization. The Traditionalism Scale is concerned with intellectual development, attention to facts, and largely ignores individual differences. The Strict Control Scale is concerned with the strictness of discipline and moral training. Shaw and Rector (1967) report the test-retest reliabilities of the individual School Opinion Survey

scales to be generally in the .70s.

Moral Judgment Interview. The written Form A (1973) of Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview consists of three short stories and several questions about each story. Although most of the previous research has used the verbal interview method, the written interview form as used in this study, is suggested for high school age and older subjects.

Procedures

All testing was done by the same investigator at the nine schools. Subjects at each school were tested as a group at a special two-hour session during regular school hours between the second and fourth weeks of the academic year. The moral judgment protocols were scored by two of Kohlberg's assistants at Harvard University. Interrater reliability was determined by having both raters score ten randomly selected protocols. Interrater reliability exceeded .90. Standard scoring procedures (Kohlberg, 1973) were used and moral maturity scores were computed as this gives the most sensitive and exact measure of moral judgment. A moral maturity score is based on the responses to the three dilemmas and is computed by determining the percentage of responses at each stage, multiplying that percentage by the stage, and summing these products. For example, subject number 40 gave 47% of her responses at stage 2 and 53% of her responses at stage 3, therefore her moral maturity score would (47 X 2) + (53 X 3) equal to 253.

Results

A 2 X 4 unweighted means analysis of variance was used to analyze the moral maturity scores for each sex and for each quartile of the three School Opinion Survey Scales. Quartiles were formed on the basis of random selection of the overlapping scores of the School Opinion Survey Scales. While there is a significant F for sex for each of the three School Opinion Survey Scales

the F is only reported for the Humanism Scale to avoid repetition. Sex is used as a variable with the Traditionalism and Strict Control Scales only to determine if an interaction exists.

Humanism

Results for the Humanism Scale indicate that females have a significantly higher moral maturity score than do the males, F (1,400) = 10.91, $p<.005$. The mean moral maturity scores for females and males are 262.52 and 252.24 respectively. There was a nonsignificant main effect for quartile, F (3,400) = 1.50, $p>.20$. The interaction as shown in Figure 1 between sex and quartile was significant, F (3,400) = 4.60, $p<.005$. Subsequent analysis of the simple main effects indicated that females had significantly higher moral maturity scores than did the males in the first and fourth quartiles, F (1,400) = 17.82, $p<.01$; F (1,400) = 6.55, $p<.05$, respectively. Analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between any of the moral maturity score means for the females; however, for the males there was a significant difference, F (3,400) = 5.35, $p<.01$. A *post hoc* Newman-Keuls procedure indicated that for males the moral maturity scores of the second and third quartiles were significantly higher ($p<.05$) than the moral maturity score of the first quartile. No other differences were significant.

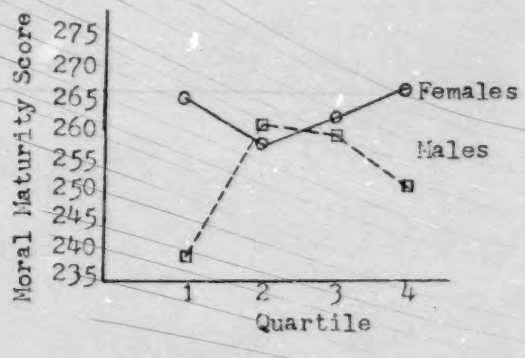

Figure 1. Relationship Between Humanism Quartiles And Mean Moral Maturity Scores.

These results indicate that for females, perception of either high or low humanism is associated with significantly higher moral maturity than is found for males who view the high school environment the same way. For males, perception of the school environment as being low in humanism is associated with moral reasoning significantly lower than those who view the high school environment as being either moderately low or moderately high in humanism.

Traditionalism

For the Traditionalism Scale there was a significant main effect for quartile, F (3,400) = 7.60, $p < .001$. The interaction was not significant. The Newman-Keuls procedure was used to test the differences between the means for the quartiles of the Traditionalism Scale. Results of these comparisons indicate that subjects who view the school as being the highest in traditionalism have significantly lower moral reasoning ($p < .05$) than subjects in all other quartiles. Subjects who view the school as being the lowest in traditionalism have significantly higher moral maturity scores than subjects who view the school as being moderately high in traditionalism.

Strict Control

For the Strict Control Scale there is a significant main effect for quartile, F (3,400) = 5.47, $p < .005$, but the interaction of sex and quartile is not significant. The Newman-Keuls procedure indicates that subjects who view the school as being lowest in strict control have significantly ($p < .05$) lower moral maturity scores than subjects in all of the other quartiles which do not differ.

Discussion

In general, the results indicate that the perception of the high school environment is related to moral reasoning in much the same way as other studies (Aron, 1972; Fodor, 1969; Haan, et al., 1968; Hoffman & Saltzstein,

1967; Holstein, 1972; Shoffeit, 1971) have found behavior and attitudes of parents to be related to moral reasoning. Of the three scales of the School Opinion Survey, the results obtained on the Humanism Scale are the most discrepant from what would be anticipated and the most difficult to explain.

The present study failed to demonstrate conclusively that there is a relationship between students' perception of the humanism of the school environment and their level of moral maturity. The results of the present study indicate, for males, anyway, that a moderately high or moderately low perception of the humanism of the school environment is associated with significantly higher moral reasoning than is very low perception of the school's humanism. Males who view the school environment as being very high in humanism have a mean moral maturity score midway between (and not significantly different from) that of the males who view the school as being very low in humanism and those who view the school environment as being moderately high or low in humanism. So for the males a moderate view of the humanism of the school environment is associated with the highest moral reasoning.

For females the perception of the humanism of the school environment is just about the opposite from the males. Although there are no significant differences in moral maturity scores between the four quartiles, the females who view the school as moderately high or moderately low in humanism have lower moral maturity scores than those who view it as very low or very high in humanism.

When students' perception of the traditionalism of their high school environment is analyzed it appears that the more the student perceives his school as stressing intellectual development, avoiding controversial differences, and failing to consider individual differences in feelings, interests, and motivations, the lower is his moral judgment score. Mean moral maturity

scores were 267, 260, 256, and 246 respectively for the lowest to highest quartiles of the Traditionalism Scale. Thus there is a progressive decrease in moral maturity corresponding to an increase in the Traditionalism score.

The results of the present study tend to be in agreement with earlier findings (Aron, 1972; Holstein, 1972; Prentice & Jurkovic, 1973) that have found parents who are low in behaviors and attitudes similar to traditionalism have children of higher moral reasoning than the children of parents who are high in traditionalism-related behaviors.

Significant differences in moral reasoning were found between those in the lowest quartile of the Strict Control Scale and those in the other three quartiles thus supporting the earlier findings of Aron (1972) and Haan, et al. (1968) who found that strict parental discipline is associated with high moral reasoning and parental permissiveness is associated with low moral reasoning. In the present study however, the relationship between strict control and moral development is not as gradual, with fairly equal intervals in moral maturity scores corresponding to the different quartiles, as is the relationship between traditionalism and moral maturity. Rather the difference is one of a discrepancy in the moral maturity score of those who scored in the lowest quartile of the Strict Control Scale and those who scores in the three other quartiles. Those who perceive the high school environment as being low in strict control are significantly lower in moral maturity than those who perceive the high school environment as being moderately low, moderately high, and very high (second, third, and fourth quartiles; respectively) in strict control.

Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental position would posit that there are not sex differences in moral development (Keasey, 1972). However, studies using the Kohlberg dilemmas have found that differences may occur starting

at the onset of adolescence. These differences usually show that a higher percentage of the females are at stage 3 whereas generally a higher percentage of males are at stages 4, 5, and 6. And if the subjects are adolescents more males than females are likely to be at stage 2.

Two unusual aspects of the present study are found when the results of this study are compared to other studies that have used the Kohlberg dilemmas. First, there is an overall low moral maturity score for the subjects. While the mean age of the subjects was 17.5 the moral development was comparable to what other studies have found in subjects of approximately 12 or 13 years of age. Related to this is the small variance of stage usage. All subjects but one were either at stage 2 or 3. Other studies generally report subjects to be at all stages from 1 through 5.

Second, with each half year increase in chronological age the females generally showed an increase in moral development whereas males generally showed a slight decrease in moral reasoning.

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INDIVIDUAL SCALE MEANS AND MORAL MATURITY SCORE MEANS CORRESPONDING TO THE QUARTILES OF THE THREE SCHOOL OPINION SURVEY SCALES

	QUARTILE			
HUMANISM	1	2	3	4
Humanism $\bar{X}$	30.51	35.53	38.21	42.07
Moral Maturity Score $\bar{X}$				
Males	238.69	260.44	259.79	250.04
Females	265.04	257.85	261.18	266.02
TRADITIONALISM				
Traditionalism $\bar{X}$	15.44	19.63	23.44	29.25
Moral Maturity Score $\bar{X}$				
Males	258.46	255.32	254.18	241.30
Females	273.51	265.86	258.69	250.35
STRICT CONTROL				
Strict Control $\bar{X}$	25.31	29.49	31.95	35.43
Moral Maturity Score $\bar{X}$				
Males	239.38	258.30	256.05	257.15
Females	255.09	264.50	259.43	270.28